Chapter 10: Suspended Lives: Undocumented Migrants' Everyday Worlds and the Making of 'Illegality' Between Morocco and Italy

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In the post-9/11 world, concern for homeland security and border control has been high on the political agenda of contemporary nation-states (Amoore, 2006; Coleman, 2007). A growing anxiety about surveillance of both their external borders and their internal territory has led them to reinforce their policies for border control and to filter migration flows toward the European Union and the United States (Faist, 2006; Newman, 2006; van Houtum and Pijper, 2007; de Genova, 2007). Many scholars have drawn attention to the dramatic consequences of the establishment of EurAfrican border regimes and to the emergence of new geopolitical imaginations that have reconfigured the very notion of 'border' (for instance, van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002; Delany, 2006; van Houtum and Boedeltje, 2009; Vaughan, 2009; Wilson and Donnan, 2012).

In this chapter, I explore the existential and embodied experience of border(ing) by focusing on the subjectivities and everyday life-worlds that emerge from the interplay of transnational border control and national migration policies in both Morocco and Italy. I combine the macro-structural analysis of EurAfrican border regimes with ethnographic research conducted in Morocco and Italy between 2008 and 2011.[1] In particular, I concentrate on the trials and tribulations of Abdelkrim, a young Moroccan man in his late 20s who migrated to Milan from the Tadla Plain, Central Morocco. This rural region at the foot of the Middle Atlas Mountains has developed intense transnational connections with Italy and Spain since the mid-1980s (Harrami and Mahdi, 2006; 2008). On the other side of the Mediterranean Milan - the largest city in Northern Italy, with 18.6% per cent of the

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population made up of foreign immigrants (Caritas-Migrantes, 2015) - is an important destination for migrants from the Tadla.

Abdelkrim's biography offers critical insights into the structural constraints, which, especially in the past decade, have produced lives suspended in the borderland, against the backdrop of the increased 'illegalization' of migration. Like many migrants who entered Italy legally, Abdelkrim slipped into 'illegality'[2] by overstaying his tourist visa, a condition in which he remained stuck for several years, while, at the same time, working in the underground economy. Recurrent amnesties have enabled many undocumented migrants in Italy to transit, and eventually emerge out of, 'illegality'. On the eve of the legal criminalization of migrants (2008-2009), Abdelkrim applied to the 2009 amnesty to regularize his legal status but he remained, in fact, suspended in a bureaucratic and legal 'limbo' (Menjivar, 2006). In 2010, he joined the Milan protests against the irregularities and the bureaucratic delays of what came to be known as the 'scam amnesty'. By shifting illegality from an individualized condition to a collective, politico-economic one, migrants reversed the Italian securitarian argument and denounced the enforced invisibility and exploitation that are the product, rather than the cause, of the increasing illegalization of migration in Italy.

Going beyond questions of the production of legal status, ethnographic attention to subjectivity and everyday life enables a grasp of the social and existential implications of the EurAfrican border regime and its 'inward' effects on national immigration policies. In this regard, Sarah Willen (2007, p. 10) has compellingly argued that, far from being simply a legal status or a socio-political condition, 'illegality' shapes particular modes of 'being-in-the-world' among undocumented migrants in Tel Aviv, Israel. This notion of 'illegality' captures important dimensions of the experiences of undocumented migrants in Europe, where a myriad of social practices and legal mechanisms have multiplied material and social boundaries beyond the geographical (dis)location of the EurAfrican borders and the fencing of the Mediterranean. Ethnographic research is, thus, indispensable to an understanding of how these ingrained dynamics - and the sociocultural background of migrants, their aspirations, moral obligations and hopes - shape the processes of illegalization (see Introduction, this volume).

By describing Abdelkrim's life between family and societal expectations in Morocco and everyday setbacks in Italy, between exploitation and political mobilization, however, my aim is not only to

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[2] It is worth noting that the notion of 'illegality', as it is referred to in relevant academic literature and public discourse, comprises two different conditions in Italy. Italian immigration law, indeed, differentiates between 'clandestine' immigrants (*immigrati clandestini*), who entered Italy without documents, and 'irregular' immigrants (*immigrati irregolari*) who fail to renew their documents when they expire.

illustrate the legal, social and existential implications of the contemporary management of global mobility. It is also to address a broader reflection on the limits posed to the understanding of the illegalization of migration itself by an approach to the EurAfrican border regime that looks only at its consequences (de Genova, 2002, p. 419). As Nicholas de Genova (2002) has argued, by naturalizing 'illegal' migration, this approach fails to capture the systematic ways in which the nation-states use the law and the judicial systems not only to filter and deport 'illegal' and 'undesirable' people, but also to construct exploitable subjects and a flexible labour force. Similarly, Michael Kearney (2004, p. 133) has maintained that border(ing) involves dynamics of classification that, alongside the production of legal status and human types, defines the subjects' socioeconomic, class positions. Inspired by these insights, I will turn the question around and interpret Abdelkrim's experience of the EurAfrican border regimes by reference to the process of the illegalization of migration. Abdelkrim's slippage into 'illegality' testifies to the extent to which becoming an 'illegal alien' in Italy can be the result both of the migration policies rhetorically legitimized in the name of legality and homeland security and, equally, of the system of exploitation that marks Italy's underground economy. While the external and internal bordering of Italy mirrors the establishment of the EurAfrican border regimes, it materializes itself in the contradictory intertwining of restrictive immigration laws and weak internal control, the criminalization of 'illegal' migration and the widespread underground economy that requires the illegal employment of exploitable migrant workers (Triandafillidou and Ambrosini, 2011). Attention to the inconsistencies of the laws and of everyday legal practices further nuances and complicates the legal-political notion of, and the lived experience of, 'illegality' in Italy. They demonstrate the gradual expansion of the bureaucratic delays and legal uncertainties by which migrants' lives and agency are constrained and the ways in which they navigate the inconsistencies of the Italian legal-political system. In a period of severe financial crisis and aggressive neoliberal economic policies, these entrenched dynamics have multiplied the material and social boundaries that push migrants to the margins of citizenship, while their legal limbo has become increasingly permanent and uncertain. At the same time, within the 'gray areas' of vulnerability and exclusion, new modes of political subjectivity and collective agency emerge, enabled by new modes of self-organization and sociability.

EuroMoroccan border regimes

Since the emergence of modern nation-states in Europe, internal and transnational mobility has been considered a matter of 'public order' and 'homeland security' (Sassen, 1999), but the current

governance of global mobility within the EurAfrican border zone is a product of relatively recent historical and political phenomena. During the last three decades, the creation of the 'Schengen area' has transformed the bond between the EU member states and their territory, between citizenship and the governance of global mobility. With the abolition of the internal borders for EU citizens moving within the European Union, which paralleled the filtering of non-EU citizens at the external borders, different classes of citizens and citizenship have been brought into being (Zanfrini, 2007, pp. 67-80). Especially in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York, the 'security-migration nexus' (Faist, 2006) has become the rhetorical basis for transnational border control, detention and deportation, as well as for restricting migration policies. Containing, filtering, regulating and blocking the movement of people from Africa to Europe are the terms in which the national policies on migration have been reconfigured.

The EuroMoroccan border is a particularly interesting case by which to scrutinize these processes. In 1990, Italy introduced visa requirement and, in 1991, Spain ended the right of Moroccan citizens to enter Spain without a visa as a consequence of the 'Schengenization' of the Spanish-African border (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008). Frontiers have been dislocated, externalized and militarized beyond the national territories on the basis of bilateral agreements between Spain and Morocco. Furthermore, the European Union has also provided borders with information systems for detecting 'illegal' migration, thereby turning their territorial boundaries into 'digitized border zones' (Broeders, 2007). For instance, Spain has established the SIVE (Integrated System of Exterior Surveillance), a sophisticated device to counter smugglers and clandestine migratory routes along the maritime Spanish-Moroccan borders (Carling 2007a, 2007b; Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008). In addition to SIVE, the European Union created FRONTEX in 2004 to combat 'illegal' migration through sophisticated technological devices for monitoring external borders and coordinated action with other institutional bodies.[3]

In turn, the intersections between Morocco's efforts to consolidate its bond with its diaspora in Europe and its partnership in military border control and the fight against illegal migration have displayed a certain ambivalence (Coslovi and Lahlou, 2006). A significant 'inward' effect of the Spanish-Moroccan agreements is the introduction in 2003 of the new migration law in Morocco. Enacted in the aftermath the 16 May 2003 terrorist attack in Casablanca, law 02/2003 restricted the criteria for legal entry and stay in Morocco and strengthened the sanctions against undocumented

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[3] For further details, see http://www.frontex.europa.eu [Accessed 20 November 2015].

migrants who cross Morocco's frontiers 'illegally' and against smugglers.[4] In doing so, Moroccan migration law has drawn a distinction between Moroccan migrants and sub-Saharan migrants in 'transit'.

Far from preventing undocumented migration from Morocco, transnational border control and restrictive national immigration laws have been paralleled by constant reconfigurations of the migratory routes. In other words, the securitization of the Mediterranean has not reduced the presence of undocumented immigrants, who continue to enter the European Union legally and overstay the duration of their travel document, tourist visa or job contract (FRONTEX, 2010). Consequently, the European States' policies have turned 'inward' (Broeders, 2007, p.78), promoting new forms of surveillance through digital and electronic systems on a large-scale (such as the Schengen Information System, SIRENE, Eurodac database, Visa Information System) for controlling 'illegal' migrants inside the national territories. In addition to transnational internal and external border control, Italy, Greece and Spain have enacted restrictive immigration policy to further filter inward migration and discourage undocumented migrants from staying in the country (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011), as had already happened in other European countries in the past three decades.

The intertwining of transnational border controls and national immigration policies has had important consequences for both migrants and aspiring migrants moving from Morocco to Italy. Before exploring the tensions between the imaginations and the lived experiences of migration under EurAfrican border regimes, I will first focus on the process of the illegalization of migration in Italy and on the legal-political economies under which the boundaries between 'legal' and 'illegal' are contextually drawn.

In the shadow of the Italian Law

The history of migration policies in Italy is one of the progressive strengthening of internal and external border control in the light of the fencing of Europe. Far from being coherent and monolithic, though, the border regimes in Italy have seen slippages and ambiguities both between the law and everyday legal practices, and between conflicting political agendas and economic

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[4] Migrants crossing the frontiers illegally risk being fined from 3,000 to 10,000 Dirham (about 300 to 1,000 Euros) and/or imprisoned for between 1 and 6 months (Art. 50), while smugglers risk being fined from 50,000 to 500,000 DH (about 5,000 to 50,000 Euros) and/or imprisoned for between 1 and 2 years (Art. 52).

interests. In Italy, immigration policies have attempted to balance the economic need for migrant labour in the domestic, construction and services sectors with electoral interests and the pressure to fence Southern Europe (Salih, 2003, p. 36). Alongside annual quotas (*decreto flussi*), which determine the number of incoming immigrants according to the needs of the labour market, the Italian government has periodically used amnesties to 'regularize' undocumented migrants. Since the 1990s, the use of the rhetoric of 'emergency' or 'invasion' about the growing presence of immigrants has fuelled feelings of social scaremongering and anxiety, which have been exacerbated to the point of outright hostility and xenophobia by some political forces, notably the Northern League (dal Lago, 2004). Despite all this, the labour of 'illegal' immigrants has become, in the shadow of Italy's immigration laws, a structural feature of the underground economy, which in Italy is deeply intertwined with the regular one (Baldwin-Edwards, 1998; Ambrosini, 1998). Undocumented migrants are particularly exposed to the exploitation and vulnerability common in many sectors of the informal economy. On the other hand, the availability of job opportunities in the underground economy, the relatively lax internal and external border checks and the mass regularizations of undocumented migrants have all contributed to making Italy a country where it was possible to live, work and earn money even without a residence permit (Renyeri, 1998). Thanks to mass regularization, indeed, many migrants were able to move from the underground economy to the legal one, from an illegal status to a legal one. Some others stayed in their irregular jobs when it meant higher wages, even after obtaining the documents (Ambrosini, 1998).

This situation changed with the introduction in 1998 of the Turco-Napolitano Law, which provided for the immediate deportation of people who had entered Italy illegally. It also established 'Temporary Detention Centres' (*Centri di Permamenza Temporanea*), where migrants are confined before receiving the decree of expulsion or being deported to one of the countries with which Italy has signed bilateral agreements on repatriation. Despite substantial overlaps between centre-left and centre-right immigration policies (Zincone, 2006), between 2002 and 2009 Berlusconi's government enacted increasingly restrictive immigration policies, and in the political and public debates migration was addressed largely in terms of 'security' and 'legality'. In 2002, the Bossi-Fini Law (Law 89/2002), which regulates migrants' rights to enter and stay in Italy, required that migrants have a long-term work contract in order for them to have their residence permit renewed for a 2-year period (*permesso di soggiorno*). An unlimited residence permit (*carta di soggiorno*) is obtainable only after six years of legal, certified and continuous stay in Italy. In the Italian labour market, where the problems of flexibility and precariousness have been severely exacerbated by the 2008 international financial crisis, making the residence permit dependent on the job contract has pushed many migrants into conditions of exploitation, illegality and deportability. More concretely,

undocumented migrants cannot regularize their legal status without a regular job; in turn, documented migrants who lose their job before the expiration date of their residence permit and cannot find another regular job, or at least an employer willing to comply with the requirements of the law, become 'illegal migrants' (*irregolari*). As such they are, to use de Genova and Peutz's phrase (2010, p. 4), subject to *deportability*, the social, political and existential condition of (potentially) being deported any time: becoming a *deportable subject*. In theory, undocumented migrants who are to be expelled can be forcibly detained in the 'Temporary Detention Centres', which were replaced in 2008 by the 'Identification and Expulsion Centres' (*Centri di Identificazione ad Esplulsione*)[5]. In fact, the financial and logistical resources required for the repatriation of undocumented migrants are limited, so, after being released with a deportation order (*foglio di via*), many migrants continue to live and work in Italy.

In 2008, the everyday lives of undocumented migrants were turned upside down by their legal 'criminalization'. This happened when Berlusconi's government combined the implementation of the Bossi-Fini Law with the enactment of the so-called 'security package' (*pacchetto sicurezza*), introduced by the Law 125/24 in 2008 and implemented by the Law 94/15 in 2009, which defined 'illegal' entry and unauthorized stay in Italy as crimes punishable with deportation and a fine of between 5,000 and 10,000 Euros (Art. 10 bis). The introduction of the 'security package' was rhetorically legitimated by the imposition of a close association between immigration, legality and security issues. In order to prevent marriages undertaken in order to gain a visa, the 'security package' also established that the foreign or stateless spouse of an Italian citizen can obtain Italian citizenship only if and when she/he has resided legally in Italy for two years at the time of the marriage. In 2010-11, the only legal mechanisms whereby undocumented migrants could regularize themselves were (1) the immigration quotas and (2) the amnesty processes for those migrants already in Italy. In both cases, migrants had to either find an employer willing to employ them legally, or to informally 'arrange' or buy a job contract. Moreover, the 'security package' strengthened the territorial surveillance exercised by local authorities and the police and envisaged territorial surveillance by citizens' associations.

Despite its aggressive rhetoric and restrictive measures, the government's struggle against 'illegal migration' did not target the employers of undocumented migrants, nor did it strengthen the control

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[5] First established by the Turco-Napolitano Law for controlling and expelling undocumented migrants, the *Centri di Permanenza Temporanea* (CPT) were included in the *Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione* and modified by the Bossi-Fini Law (art.14). In 2008, the decree 'Misure urgenti in material di sicurezza pubblica' (92/2008), and then Law 125/2008, changed the CPT to *Centri di Idenitificazione ad Esplulsione,* where the length of time undocumented migrants can be detained is 180 days (Law 94/2009).

and inspections in those sectors where migrants are usually employed. In this regard, Maurizio Ambrosini and Anna Triadafilly (2011) have compellingly argued that the profound contradictions between excessively regulated labour markets and large informal economies and between strict external border control and weak internal controls, serve the needs of the labour market in a time of crisis. The criminalization of undocumented migrants, inefficient internal control, and permissive attitudes toward the underground economy have all increased migrants' vulnerability vis-à-vis their employers who, indeed, have the power to decide whether and under what conditions to regularize them.

Abdelkrim's migration story took shape against the backdrop of this complex politico-economic scenario. His subjective and embodied experience of 'illegality' was deeply affected by the changes in the immigration laws and the labour market in Italy, but also by the effect on him of family and societal expectations in Morocco. By situating Abdelkrim's ups and downs in relation to both Morocco and Italy, I intend to draw attention to the complexity of his lived experience of border(ing).

Searching for an adventure

When I met Abdelkrim in Milan in October 2010, he was going through a difficult period in his life. He was full of conflicting feelings that were leading him to a state of despair. He thought of returning to Morocco because his stay in Italy had not helped him to improve his life: on the contrary, in his view, migration had turned him into a different person. Discussing the social and economic problems that motivate Moroccan young people to migrate to Southern Europe in search of better living conditions - such as the lack of development, unemployment, corruption and social injustice - Abdelkrim specified that initially he did not want to migrate. He emphasized instead that his family was not in economic need. Before migrating, he was studying at the university and working in a factory. In his spare time, he volunteered in a local cultural association and had a passion for art. 'I arrived in Italy with a lot of money,' he repeated several times to stress that his parents had supported him economically and that he had a moral debt toward them.

The story that Abdelkrim told me about his migratory experience was shaped by his difficult circumstances, and many aspects of his life before and after migration remained unspoken. His narrative oscillated between two opposite images of migration. On the one hand, he described his departure as a 'sudden event' when, in 2004, his paternal uncle, who had already migrated to Milan,

managed to find him a tourist visa. Within a few days, he had to take a quick decision with no time to ponder. 'If only my brother had been there, he would have prevented me from leaving', he regretted. On the other hand, he evoked the image of migration as an 'adventure' that he was looking forward to, even though things turned out to be different, as he explained: 'I wanted an adventure, but there was no adventure at all!' After his document expired, Abdelkrim was not able to find the job contract that would have enabled him to regularize his position and, consequently, to return home to visit his family. His migration to Italy, which was made possible by the concrete opportunity of obtaining a tourist visa, took shape against the backdrop of the imaginary and social practices that support both documented and undocumented mobility to Italy. The trope of migration as a risky and exciting adventure (*mughamara*), by which Abdelkrim at times motivated his departure, is one important dimension of Moroccan youths' narratives about the 'outside world' (*l-brra, l-kharij*) in the Tadla. Despite the uncertainties surrounding migration, the idea of 'adventure' implies that the risk is worth taking.

Since the mid-1980s the Tadla Plain (Central Morocco) has become the Moroccan epicentre of the migratory trajectories of men and women to Italy and Spain (Jacquement, 1995; Harrami and Mahdi, 2006; 2008; de Haas, 2007). The attraction of the idea of migration was planted in the Tadla Plain in the 1970s by the Beni Meskin, a group of cattle ranchers originating from Settat who had practiced transnational mobility to Italy outside institutional channels since the late 1960s (dal Lago, 1994; Harrami and Mahdi, 2006). Noureddine Harrami and Mohammed Mahdi (2006, p.39) have pointed out: 'The signs of wealth that these migrants, who had occupied the lowest level of the local social hierarchy, manifested on their return became regarded in the region as irrefutable proof of the existence of an *El Dorado* on the other side of the Mediterranean' (my translation). Beside creating an imagination of Italy as a land of opportunities, the presence of the Beni Meskin in the Tadla favoured the circulation of information germane to the establishment of migratory chains. Under the Structural Adjustment Plan (1983-1993) and the crisis of the agricultural sector in the early 1980s, documented and undocumented migrations to Italy and Spain became an important phenomenon and continues to this day to be a critical dimension of young people's fantasies and everyday lives. Before the international financial crisis in 2008, transnational migration favoured economic dynamism in the Tadla, whose economy is mainly based on agriculture and the agribusiness industry, cattle and sheep breeding, commerce and handicraft. The migrants' remittances and their investment in land, construction, agriculture and local business have all contributed to the rapid growth of medium-sized towns in the Tadla. By turning farm workers into landowners and poor but ambitious youths into local businessmen, migration has also enabled new trajectories of social mobility and transformed the local social hierarchies.

The fashionable items, clothes and electronic devices that migrants bring home with them on their summer holidays (Salih, 2003) and the second-hand European commodities available in the local weekly market are material reminders of the lure of the outside world. The display of these locally prized material symbols often fuels the desire for mobility in youths with low-class backgrounds, who claim: 'If you don't have money nobody respects you' or 'If you don't have a car, people don't even greet you in the streets'.[6] Even though the experiences of and motivations for migrating are multiple and nuanced, many young people regard migration as offering the real possibility of 'building their own future', namely creating *dorof*, the socio-economic conditions indispensable to taking up gendered duties and family responsibilities (Juntunen 2002, pp. 86-110). Since the 1990s, a growing number of women have migrated alone, but transnational migration is regarded mainly as a 'male affair'. Success and failure are measured against the ideals and expectations around masculinity, such as the ability to muddle through and face hardship, to earn the resources to invest in durable goods like land and the household and to become ready for marriage and domestic life (Juntunen 2002; see also Osella and Osella, 2000 on Kerala). While migration is often described as a means of fulfilling manhood and gendered responsibilities, some young people imagine migration as the opportunity to escape social demands and to lead a different lifestyle, to enjoy freedom and economic independence.

For Abdelkrim, migration represented the opportunity to travel and improve his life. As with many other Moroccan youths arriving in Italy, he soon worked out that making money easily and honestly, and then returning to Morocco and to set up a business, is harder than he expected. Apart from the closure of Europe and the 'illegalization' of undocumented migration, the global financial crisis has had important implications for current and aspiring migrants alike. The scarcity of job opportunities in Italy and Spain has further reduced Moroccan migrants' chances of finding the job contract required to enter those countries legally and to regularize their legal status when their documents expire. For Abdelkrim, migrating to Italy has been less the beginning of an adventure than a pathway toward enforced invisibility and an unpredictable endeavour to get out of his 'illegal life'. His fragmented testimony reveals the material and existential implications of the increased inward bordering taking place in Italy since the 'criminalization' of migrants has coincided with the international financial crisis.

Clandestinity in everyday life in Milan

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[6] Fieldnotes, May 2009.

When Abdelkrim arrived in Italy in 2004, he stayed with the uncle who had helped him with his documents. Initially, he worked in his uncle's shop without receiving a proper salary. In Abdelkrim's view, his uncle exploited him and tried to hinder his desire to go to Northern Europe, where he thought he might have better opportunities to improve his life. In turn, his uncle, who regarded Abdelkrim as immature, would remind him that he himself had slept in a car when he first arrived in Italy, and that everything he had was the result of hardship and sacrifice. Abdelkrim's dependence on his uncle created tensions between them and he eventually left his home and found other accommodation.

Abdelkrim told me that he had tried to set up a business with a Moroccan acquaintance, but that his legal status prevented him from carrying out his plans. When he left his uncle's home, he worked as a construction worker and did jobs *in nero* (without a regular contract) in order to make a living and to send money to his family in Morocco. At weekends and after work he repaired satellite dishes, mobile phones and computers. He portrayed his everyday life in Italy as suspended and blocked. Comparing his life before and after migrating, he said that in Morocco he was respected by his family and friends for his wisdom and temperance, and that the experience of migration turned him into a different person. Since his legal status prevented him from doing any long-term planning, he often mulled over the past and on how things could have been different. For example, Abdelkrim regretted not having bought a job contract when the price was still affordable and Italian immigration law was less restrictive. Since his arrival in 2004, the political debate on immigration has become increasingly connected to issues of security and legality, which, in turn, rhetorically legitimized restrictive measures and narrowed the legal criteria under which migrants could enter and stay. Moreover, the financial crisis has both increased the sense of competition between migrants, who agree to work for very low wages, and limited young Italians' chances of finding a regular job. When Abdelkrim could not find a job, he fell into a state of despair. 'I walk in the streets, I talk alone, like a fool,' he said. He preferred to work and busy himself despite the dangers of doing construction jobs without any health insurance and the feeling of being exploited, especially when he had to work on Saturday and Sunday. Nevertheless, working helped him to stay in the present without thinking too much about his situation, able to forget the expectations of the past and the uncertainties of the future.

Abdelkrim shared his predicament with his friend Rami, an undocumented Egyptian young man he had met in an association that provides migrants with free Italian language courses. They had since then became close friends: both were under pressure from their families to contribute financially and to return to marry, and they supported each other morally and materially in difficult times.

Abdelkrim phoned his family in Morocco only once a month because his mother's questions about when he was going to visit Morocco made him feel depressed and humiliated. On the other hand, he knew that returning to Morocco without enough money to start a business and with little chance of finding a good job meant admitting failure to his family, who had supported his departure, and to his friends and acquaintances. Whereas he described his father as an educated and open-minded person he also complained about his authoritarian personality. Conflicts between them often arose around his father's demands that he send remittances regularly. Moreover, Abdelkrim explained to me that the police had stopped him to check his documents, but without serious consequences. On a second arrest, however, he was brought to the Police Headquarters and received a deportation order (*foglio di via*) according to which he should have left Italy. Describing his experience of 'being stuck', he often told me: 'It's like being in prison'. With this image, Abdelkrim described the existential incarceration (see also Capello, 2008) engendered by the impossibility both of returning to Morocco and of getting out of his 'illegal' status.

For Abdelkrim, Rami, and many other undocumented migrants, the chance to regularize their legal status came in August 2009, when the Italian government enacted the amnesty (*Decreto legge per l'emersione*) targeting only migrants employed illegally in the domestic sector or as caregivers for the elderly (*badanti*) for at least the previous three months. As it was the only way of escaping 'illegality', many migrant men and women who had lived and worked in Italy for years participated in the amnesty regardless of their actual jobs. In many cases, they paid between 2,000 and 10,000 Euros to their real or fictitious employer in order to apply. This decree became known as the 'scam amnesty' (*sanatoria-truffa*) because many applicants could not be legalized due to bureaucratic irregularities, the limited amount of human resources assigned to dealing with almost 300,000 applications, the highly contested criteria established by the amnesty and the consequent court cases. Many applicants were cheated by fictive employers who applied for many people in order to make money but did not meet the criteria established by the 2009 Amnesty and gave them a false receipt. Finally yet importantly, many migrants turned out to be ineligible after the Manganelli decree (17 March 2010) restricted *a posteriori* the criteria for regularization, excluding those people who, like Abdelkrim, had been expelled twice. This complex situation turned Abdelkrim's dream of getting out of his illegal condition into a nightmare of bureaucratic and existential uncertainty.

The Imbonati Tower protest in Milan

On 5 November 2010, I was strolling in Milan with Abdelkrim when he received a call from a friend. He explained that a group of migrants had climbed the Carlo Erba factory tower, a disused industrial chimney situated in Imbonati Street, to protest about the plight of those people who had applied to the 2009 amnesty but whose residence permit had not yet been issued. Supporters of the protesters, including migrants' associations, Milanese citizens, trade unions, associations and NGOs, gathered at the base of the tower to supply food, water and clothes, and to help organize the protest (Riccio, 2010). Abdelkrim wanted to join them.

A few weeks earlier, on 16 October 2010, another group of migrants had climbed and occupied a crane in a construction site in Brescia in order to make their protest heard. In both Milan and Brescia,[7] the activists chose these forms of protest because their previous actions had been ignored by the local authorities. For around six months the Milanese branch of the *Comitato Immigrati,* a national migrants' association created in 2001, had tried to initiate a political dialogue with the local authorities on the issue of the 'scam amnesty'. They had promoted a number of sit-ins in front of the Prefecture, organized demonstrations and a general strike supported by independent trade unions, and requested three meetings with the prefect without any concrete result. Eventually, a group of migrants occupied the Imbonati Street tower to press the Italian government to issue the documents of those people whose applications to the 'scam amnesty' had been rejected or who had not yet received any response. By taking a stand against the crime of clandestinity introduced by the 'security package' (24/2009) and against the Manganelli decree, the protesters claimed the right to live and work lawfully in Italy. They wanted the Italian government to give 'an answer to our demand for the right to live a decent life, which includes being granted a residence permit' (Comitato Immigrati in Italia, 2010).

In much of the Italian political and media debate, these protests were addressed as a 'public order' problem, considered by the local authorities to be illegal and unauthorized expressions of dissent. Against this the protesters[8] called for a rethink of the tautological nexus between legality, migration and security. In their view, far from being a crime, being an illegal alien in Italy is the product of the Italian political-legal system. It is precisely the Bossi-Fini law, with the mechanism of 'contract of employment', that prevents people from regularizing their status. For instance, one leaflet

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[7] For a thorough analysis of the migrants' protests in Brescia and Milan, see also Carissimo (2011).

[8] While I focus here on the Via Imbonati protests in Milan, it is worth noting the actions of migrants in Rosarno in January 2010 who denounced the extreme conditions of exploitation and marginalization in which they were forced to live and work, see Corriere della Sera (2010). For a historical overview of the migrants' movement in Italy, see for instance: Basso and Perocco (2003).

published by the *Rete Immigrati Auto-organizzati*, an association that emerged in November 2009 from an internal split from the *Comitato Immigrati*, states:

> This legislative gap produces a market of illegal workers at the mercy of recruiters of daily labourers (*caporali*) and brokers, who recruit their workforce in Loreto Square or at the gate of the Vegetable Market. It encourages tax evasion and the reduction of the safety rules at work, in addition to worsening everybody's working conditions (Comitato Immigrati Auto-organizzati, 2011).

As the statements above make clear, the activists reversed the state's securitarian argument and claimed that 'illegality' in Italy is not the cause of the politics of the illegalization of migration, but rather its main product. Furthermore, the combination of laws restricting immigration, the economic situation and the specificities of the Italian underground economy had worked to reinforce the exploitability and vulnerability of migrants. The protesters' struggle also had long-term objectives such as obtaining residence permits for those workers who accuse their employer of exploitation and illegal employment, extending the duration of the residence permit for those who lose their job, a new law for migrants and refugees, the right to vote after 5 years of legal residence and the right to citizenship for children of migrants (Comitato Immigrati in Italia, 2010).

There were protests by migrants' in Italy before these events (Perocco, Basso and Sciortino, 2003, pp. 378-79), but the tightening of the immigration laws in order to discourage undocumented migrants' stay has multiplied the numbers of *sans papiers* who remain trapped in 'illegality'. By putting their bodies at the centre of their protests, the activists gave voice to the migrants' claims that had been addressed only in the rhetoric of legality and security. The eruption into public visibility of the migrants' previously invisible bodies became a powerful tool which contributed to the opening up of a debate at the national level and of negotiations with the local authorities.

Discussing the undocumented migrants' protests, Didier Fassin (2011, p. 221) has noted: 'the body appears to be the ultimate resource they can mobilize to legitimize their social existence and obtain legal recognition.' In this sense, the Imbonati protest sheds light on the multiple obstacles that migrants have to face in their search for a dialogue with Italian officialdom. Migrants' protests in Milan and Brescia share similar political practices with workers' protests throughout Italy and reveal common politico-economic dimensions: from the mobilization of the workers of the Innse Press, an ancient Milanese factory, who occupied a crane in August 2009, to the occupation of rooftops by workers to protest against dismissals, delocalization and closure (Carissimo, 2011).

Despite the practical and climatic difficulties, the group of migrants who climbed the Imbonati Street tower resisted for 27 days[9]. In the aftermath of their protest, the *Comitato Immigrati* and the *Rete Immigrati Auto-Organizzati* continued to organize public events to keep the attention of the Italian public on this issue. Abdelkrim participated in the sit-in in Imbonati Street even though he was sceptical of the possibility that the Italian institutions would react promptly to their requests. Although he worried that the Manganelli decree would formally exclude him from eligibility for the 2009 Amnesty because he had received a deportation order, it was still possible that the migrants' protests could lead to a general amnesty. But the state of suspension in which Abdelkrim found himself after the migrants came down from the tower crumbled his hope of escaping his condition of illegality. In February 2010 many applicants, including Abdelkrim and his friend Rami, had still not received any response to their application to the 2009 Amnesty, and so were preparing the papers to apply to the immigration quotas for February 2011.

Conclusion

Undocumented migration into Italy continues to be depicted as an 'uncontrolled invasion', and framed as a matter of legality and security in media and political debates. Far from being a series of random, disorganized processes, however, the so-called 'illegal' migration is in fact a structural feature of the contemporary dynamics of global mobility. More precisely, it is the product of specific modalities of the governmental, political and judicial apparatuses that define the boundaries between 'legal' and 'illegal'. Groups and individuals, indeed, move along highly structured trajectories within legal, political and global economic systems, which define opportunities and constraints (Sassen, 1999).

By tracing, in particular, Abelkrim's trajectory from his birthplace in the Tadla Plain to Milan I have tried to shed light on the ways in which his search for adventure progressively became a struggle to escape illegality and forced invisibility in the face of changes in the immigration laws and the labour market in Italy. Over the past decade, the contradictions between restrictive immigration laws and weak internal control and between the criminalization of 'illegal' migration and the employment of large numbers of migrants in the underground economy have significantly

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[9] On 15 November 2010, serious medical conditions led two activists to come down from the Imbonati Street Tower and they succeeded in vanishing. On 28 November 2010, another man was hospitalized and then released by the physician without the police being informed, which created controversy. Finally, on 2 December 2010, the remaining activists came down, a man of Argentine-Italian origin and an undocumented migrant; the latter was repatriated to Morocco despite the activists' protests.

constrained migrants' agency and reduced the scale of their existence. Since being an 'illegal' migrant has become a crime in Italy, ordinary activities such as working, dwelling, travelling, protesting and imagining a better life have become 'illegal' acts. Far from stopping undocumented migrants entering and staying in the country, the long term process of creating 'illegality' in Italy has resulted in expanding the legal limbo and in serving the interests of the underground economy: undocumented migrants remain in conditions of enforced vulnerability that guarantee the subordination of a flexible reserve of labour in a period of financial crisis (Triandafillidou and Ambrosini, 2011). It was in this context that the condition of 'illegality' in which Abdelkrim found himself trapped came to shape important dimensions both of his life and of his sense of self. Over the years, his stay in Italy has made all aspects of his life - economic, social and personal - progressively more precarious.

The image of Abdelkrim in his suspended and bordered life captures the material and existential implications of EurAfrican borders and its 'inward' effects. His biography, nevertheless, shows not only the connections between clandestine life and exploitation, but also between social exclusion and political mobilization. By joining the protests on Imbonati Street, Abdelkrim took his individual vulnerability into a network of relationships where new forms of subjectivity and political practices have taken shape. By claiming the right to live and work lawfully, Abdelkrim and the activists reversed the securitarian argument about the need for security and legality, and demonstrated that being an 'illegal alien' is not an ontological fact. On the contrary, they invite us to rethink the EurAfrican border regimes in the light of the illegalization of transnational migration. In doing so, they make visible the institutional processes of inclusion and exclusion through which certain types of human beings and power relations are brought into being.

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